The Last Fairy Tale

by Paul Magrs

THE DOCTOR: PETER DAVISON
Time traveller.

TURLOUGH: MARK STRICKSON
Time traveller's companion.

GRAYLING FRIMLISH:
(M, 50+) An elderly Storyteller, spry and twinkling.

DIAMON:
(F, 20s) The Princess of the village – fairest and kindest of them all.

ALITHA:
(F, 50+) A hideous witch, rasping and vengeful.

ALSO: SHIRI [non-speaking – a dwarf who can only grunt aggressively]; **TOWNSFOLK.**

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SCENE 1: EXT. WOODS

FX: BIRDSONG. TARDIS MATERIALISES. DOOR OPENS.

DOCTOR:
(EXITING) The scenery should be rather breath-taking, so if you're serious about a little painting…

TURLOUGH:
No, all I'm bringing is a sketchpad. The easel's a hostage to fortune.

FX: DOCTOR CLOSES DOOR.

DOCTOR:
Just look at that view. We've caught the autumn, too.

TURLOUGH:
It's glorious.

DOCTOR:
I believe there's a small town in the valley. I suggest a brisk walk, or a jog, perhaps?

TURLOUGH:
A jog?!

DOCTOR:
If you're going to sit around drawing for hours, we might as well get some exercise in first… (BEGINS TO JOG GENTLY)

FX: VEGETATION CRACKLING UNDERFOOT.

TURLOUGH:
(CALLING AFTER) I'm not jogging anywhere! (BEAT; TO SELF) Oh, for Trion's sake. — Wait. Wait!

FX: HE JOGS AFTER DOCTOR.

CROSS-FADE TO:

SCENE 2: EXT. WOODS [MOMENTS LATER]

FX: DOCTOR AND TURLOUGH JOGGING ALONG.

TURLOUGH:
This is supposed to be a little rest, you said. Back to a simpler time. The ancient forests of Medieval Europe.

DOCTOR:
Well, here we are! We must beware of the wildlife, of course. Boars, bears, and so on. Some of the humans can be quite savage, too.

TURLOUGH:
Great.

DOCTOR:
Nothing to worry about for seasoned travellers like us, eh?

TURLOUGH:
Watch out — this bit's quite steep…!

DOCTOR:
Keep a straight back and you won't lose your footing — (LOSING HIS FOOTING) Whoa!

TURLOUGH:
(GRABBING DOCTOR) It's alright, I've got you. —

FX: SLIPPING ON LEAVES.

TURLOUGH:
(LOSING HIS FOOTING) Whoaaa!!!

FX: SERIES OF CRASHES AS BOTH TURLOUGH AND THE DOCTOR TUMBLE DOWN A STEEP INCLINE, BREAKING THROUGH TANGLED UNDERGROWTH.

DOCTOR AND TURLOUGH:
(CRY OUT AS THEY FALL)

FX: THUMP! THUMP! AS THEY CRASH TO A STOP IN UNDERGROWTH.

DOCTOR AND TURLOUGH:
(WINDED, EG:) Oof!/ Oof!

BEAT.

TURLOUGH:
(GROANING) Ow. Ow ow ow…!

DOCTOR:
(WINDED) Turlough? Are you alright-?

TURLOUGH:
(REALISES SKETCHPAD'S CRUSHED) Oh, no…!

FX: HEAVY FOOTSTEPS AS SOMEONE STRIDES UP FROM OFF.

DOCTOR:
Someone's coming.

GRAYLING:
(APPROACHING) What's all this, then? What are you two up to? Hiding in the bushes to ambush the unwary?

DOCTOR:
(GETTING UP) Not at all, we fell. Um, could you help us? I fear my friend has hurt himself…

TURLOUGH:
I'm fine. I've ruined my sketchpad, though.

DOCTOR:
Well, perhaps you shouldn't have dragged me down the slope.

TURLOUGH:
I was stopping you from falling!

GRAYLING:
You fell all the way down there?! — Well, I'm glad you dropped by, friends! (AMUSED BY SELF) Dropped by…!

TURLOUGH:
Pleased to meet you, Oscar Wilde.

GRAYLING:
(GOING OVER) Let me help you up, young sir.

FX: AS GRAYLING HELPS DOCTOR UP:

DOCTOR:
Thank you. I'm the Doctor, and this is Turlough. We're, er, travellers. And you are… a gentleman of the road, perhaps?

TURLOUGH:
(ON FEET, MUTTERING) Certainly smells like one.

GRAYLING:
I am Grayling Frimlish. Many years I have travelled this world. I have seen just about everywhere there is to see!

TURLOUGH:
I doubt that.

DOCTOR:
Thank you, Turlough.

GRAYLING:
I have been walking all of my life. Resting only now and then. But at last I am near the end of my travels — and my story too, I think…

DOCTOR:
The end…? Are you going to the village?

GRAYLING:
Vadhoc, yes. It isn't far. We can rest there, and eat. Will you walk with me?

DOCTOR:
Why not!

TURLOUGH:
Do you want a list of reasons?

FX: GRAYLING IS ALREADY STRIDING OFF.

GRAYLING:
Come, then, friends! (STILL CHORTLING AT SELF) 'Dropped by'! Ha!!!

FX: DOCTOR AND TURLOUGH FOLLOW.

CROSSFADE TO:

SCENE 3: EXT. VADHOC TOWN OUTSKIRTS

FX: FADE UP NOISE OF BUSTLING TOWN AS OUR HEROES APPROACH PERIMETER AND GATEWAY. CARTS, CHATTER, HENS, RAUCOUS CRIES FROM A BUSY MARKET AND A CROWD GATHERING.

TURLOUGH:
It's all a bit busier than I imagined a medieval village would be…

GRAYLING:
I expect there's something special going on today, hm?

DOCTOR:
What might that be, I wonder?

GRAYLING:
(CALLING) Hello! Hello, there, Miss…!

DIAMON:
(COMING OVER) Greetings, strangers! I am Diamon. Welcome to our town, on this most auspicious of days!

DOCTOR:
Why auspicious? What's going on?

GRAYLING:
Is it a jamboree? I'm partial to a jamboree.

TURLOUGH:
Please, not some ghastly festival.

DIAMON:
It is a day my people have awaited for many years. A special boon will be granted to us this day.

GRAYLING:
A boon!

DIAMON:
We are very lucky indeed.

GRAYLING:
Luckier than my new friends here. They suffered a nasty fall in the woods. (CONFIDENTIALLY) Between you and me, I don't think they're much used to travelling.

TURLOUGH:
This is embarrassing…

DIAMON:
No, they do not look as if they belong in our land. Such strange vestments. — You have come a great distance, I think?

DOCTOR:
We have, rather. But I must say, we've been charmed by everything we've seen so far.

DIAMON:
You intrigue me. You and your flame-haired companion.

GRAYLING:
And me? Do I intrigue you, as well?

DIAMON:
Not you, no.

GRAYLING:
Oh! But I am a wayfarer, as well. I have journeyed from afar. Untold distances have I walked. The width and breadth of all the lands. Just look at these feet…!

DIAMON:
You look a bit scruffy, to be honest. We're having a day of celebration in Vadhoc. You might lower the tone.

GRAYLING:
A bit scruffy! Oh! Does that really matter?

DOCTOR:
Life on the road must be very hard.

GRAYLING:
It is! And I've come so far!

DIAMON:
If these two fine-looking gentlemen are prepared to accept responsibility for you, I'm sure we can let you visit Vadhoc. For a day.

GRAYLING:
Oh, thank you very much! Most gracious of you, miss.

TURLOUGH:
(GROANS) Now we're stuck with him…!

DIAMON:
I shall show you in, strangers. (CALLING) Let them through!

FX: HUGE GATES CREAK OPEN, OFF.

SCENE 4: EXT. SQUARE — OUTSIDE THE SEVERED PAW

FX: FADE UP. BUSY, CHATTERING, EXCITED CROWD. SNATCHES OF CHATTER AS GRAYLING AND TURLOUGH WALK THROUGH.

TOWNSFOLK:
What time is he starting?/
Where's it to be?/
First time in so many years…/
I think I remember my father saying he heard a Storyteller once…/
Outside The Severed Paw…/
In Talespinner Square…/
Could it be the same man, after so long…?

GRAYLING:
It looks like everyone from miles around has converged on the town today. How exciting!

TURLOUGH:
Seems a bit rowdy, if you ask me.

GRAYLING:
There's nothing wrong with a bit of rowdiness. Not after years of solitary wandering in the wilderness…

TURLOUGH:
(STOPPING) Hold on, where's the Doctor gone?

GRAYLING:
He was just ahead of us, talking to that lovely young woman.

TURLOUGH:
Making friends, as usual. — I can't see them through these crowds!

GRAYLING:
Never mind, we can catch up with them later. Look where fortune has brought us — The Severed Paw!

TURLOUGH:
The what? (REALISATION) We are not going inside some rough old pub.

GRAYLING:
(EXITING INTO PUB) Come along, friend Turlough!

CROSS INTO:

SCENE 5: INT. THE SEVERED PAW [CONTINUOUS]

FX: CRACKLE OF FIRE; MURMUROUS CHATTER OF DRINKERS. GLASSES BEING THUMPED DOWN ON WOODEN TABLES.

GRAYLING:
What a delightfully squalid inn!

TURLOUGH:
It's foul.

GRAYLING:
But the ambience! Isn't it perfect? Isn't this what every weary traveller longs to discover on the road?

TURLOUGH:
A nice cocktail bar, perhaps. Not a place like this!

FX: THEY MOVE TOWARDS BAR.

GRAYLING:
(CALLING) Barkeep! Two foaming tankards of your very darkest ale, please.

FX: SQUISH OF ALE FROM TAP. OVER THIS:

TURLOUGH:
Look at the people in here! I'm not sure some of them qualify as people, even.

GRAYLING:
Don't look now, but someone's got their eye on you.

TURLOUGH:
Who?

GRAYLING:
At the end of the bar. That foul-looking strumpet with the eye-patch and the broom, and the dagger between her teeth. Not to mention the great brindled wolf curled at her feet with his hackles raised. Oh, and that hunchbacked dwarf with the axe. All three are shooting you the most horrible looks.

TURLOUGH:
What have I done to them?

FX: THUNK OF TWO TANKARDS ON THE BAR.

GRAYLING:
You're the stranger in town. Funny clothes. Snooty attitude. You don't fit in.

TURLOUGH:
So what am I supposed to do about it?

GRAYLING:
Drink your ale and smile graciously.

TURLOUGH:
(SIPS BEER; SPLUTTERS) That's disgusting…!

GRAYLING:
(SUPS BEER HEARTILY) Ahh! (CALLING) Barkeep, does the barrel have a dead rat floating in it? — It does? Good! It's very delicious, sir. My congratulations!

TURLOUGH:
How come they're not giving you the evil eye?

GRAYLING:
I fit in splendidly. Now sit quietly and wait, like everybody else.

TURLOUGH:
Wait for what? To have my throat cut?

GRAYLING:
It's a special day here in Vadhoc. Everyone's waiting. They're becoming quite impatient.

TURLOUGH:
What are they waiting for?

GRAYLING:
Why, don't you know? — The coming of the Storyteller!

SCENE 6: EXT. VADHOC TOWN CENTRE

FX: DOCTOR AND DIAMON WALK THROUGH QUIETER CROWDS.

DIAMON:
This way, stranger.

DOCTOR:
“Doctor”, please. Odd, the way the crowds seem to draw away as you approach, Diamon.

DIAMON:
It is not for me alone… “Doctor”.

DOCTOR:
No, of course not — (STOPPING; REALISATION) Wait. Where’s Turlough got to? And that fellow Frimlish?

DIAMON:
We’ve lost them in the crowd. Do they matter?

DOCTOR:
Well, yes. They’re my friends.

DIAMON:
Never mind them. Today, the Storyteller comes to Vadhoc.

DOCTOR:
Very nice, I’m sure. (SCANNING CROWD) I can’t see them anywhere…!

DIAMON:
The old tales never told us what the Storyteller would look like. We didn’t know who to expect.

DOCTOR:
I daresay that’s terribly inconvenient. — Why does everyone keep giving us such funny looks?

DIAMON:
The townsfolk regard me with awe, because I am their Princess.

DOCTOR:
Their what?

DIAMON:
But I am not the source of their awe and excitement for once. These people have gathered from near and far to hear our visitor speak. Vadhoc has known nothing like it since a Storyteller last came, back in my Grandmother’s time.

DOCTOR:
What a fascinating ritual.

DIAMON:
We are all most eager to hear what you have come to tell us.

DOCTOR:
What?! Me…?

DIAMON:
You needn't go on pretending. I knew who you were from the very first. You are special. Your peculiar clothes. The quizzical look in your eye. Your open face.

DOCTOR:
I'm flattered, Diamon. But really, I'm no-one special. I'm just passing through.

DIAMON:
Come now, Storyteller. Your arrival has long been foretold. You wouldn't want to disappoint us — would you?

SCENE 7: INT. THE SEVERED PAW

FX: AMBIENCE AS BEFORE. TANKARD SLAMMED ON TABLE.

TURLOUGH:
You're talking about the Doctor!

GRAYLING:
What? Am I?

TURLOUGH:
It all fits! Don't you see?

GRAYLING:
Not really, but then I'm not as bright as a young fellow like you and this is my second pint…

TURLOUGH:
The mysterious stranger who wanders into town, his coming foretold by legend. It's always the Doctor!

GRAYLING:
Does your Doctor tell incredible tales of long-ago heroes and terrible monsters and feats of derring-do? Is his mind a vast compendium of myths and near-myths?

TURLOUGH:
Yes, it is! That's the Doctor all over. Sometimes he mentions places he's been and adventures he's had in this offhand kind of way, and I hardly know whether to believe him or not…

GRAYLING:
Are we talking about the same chap? The blond one? Quite mild-mannered?

TURLOUGH:
He might look quite unassuming, I agree…

GRAYLING:
He seemed something of a dull young fellow to me.

TURLOUGH:
He puts that on. It's an act. He's got so many enemies in the universe, you see. He slips through unnoticed… Hey, this ale stuff isn't too bad, you know…

GRAYLING:
It's the dead rat, I told you.

FX: ALITHA BARRELS OVER.

ALITHA:
Here, you. The redhead.

TURLOUGH:
What? Urgh. What is it?

ALITHA:
I've had my eye on you since you came in here with your dirty friend…

GRAYLING:
Huh! Dirty!

ALITHA:
You say you're friends with the Storyteller? You actually know him?

TURLOUGH:
I do indeed, old woman!

ALITHA:
I see…

GRAYLING:
Oh dear, Turlough. Perhaps you shouldn't go showing off…

TURLOUGH:
I'm not! All I'm saying is that the Doctor [could tell you a thing or two…]

ALITHA:
(RAISES VOICE TO OTHERS) Shiri! Zounds! Over here!

SHIRI:
(GRUNTS INCOHERENTLY AS HE STOMPS OVER: "Coming, Alitha!")

GRAYLING:
What language is that, that your dwarven friend speaks?

ALITHA:
The same as ours. But once upon a time our other companion here — Zounds, the devil hound — bit out his tongue. He's been completely unintelligible ever since.

GRAYLING:
Then why did he not put the dog down?

SHIRI:
(GRUNTS IN EXPLANATION: "It was a very long time ago and we're all friends again now.")

GRAYLING:
What's he saying?

ALITHA:
That it was a very long time ago and we're all friends again now.

ZOUNDS:
(BARKS AFFIRMATIVELY)

TURLOUGH:
Do you know — we met a Sontaran who'd bit off his own tongue, once. Me and the Doctor.

ALITHA:
So, it seems we have indeed found the Storyteller! Where is he now?

TURLOUGH:
The Doctor? He's not here. He's out in the streets somewhere with that young woman, Diamon…

GRAYLING:
A rather lovely young lady. He's no fool, your Doctor.

ALITHA:
So he thinks he's safe with the Princess, does he? No matter. Shiri, Zounds — we'll take the Storyteller's flame-haired companion in his stead. As our hostage!

SHIRI/ZOUNDS:
(GRUNT/WHINE AFFIRMATIVELY)

TURLOUGH:
I beg your pardon?

GRAYLING:
I don't like the look of this situation, Turlough. These three seem a bit cut-throat to me.

FX: SCUFFLE AS THE RUFFIANS TAKE HOLD OF THEIR PRISONERS. ALE IS SPILLED. DISQUIET AMONG PATRONS.

TURLOUGH:
(GRABBED) Hey, what's going on?

ALITHA:
(CALLING TO BAR) Put down your drinks and put up your hands! Zounds, Shiri — disarm everyone.

SHIRI/ZOUNDS:
(GRUNT/BARK AFFIRMATIVELY)

ALITHA:
All of you — get down on the floor!

TURLOUGH:
I'm not lying on that filthy floor…

GRAYLING:
Best do as she says, Turlough…

ALITHA:
Get on the floor! This is a hostage situation! You're all our prisoners now!

SCENE 8: EXT. SQUARE — OUTSIDE THE SEVERED PAW

DOCTOR:
Whoever this "Storyteller" is, Diamon — I promise you, it isn't me!

DIAMON:
Legend has it that the Storyteller is playful, quixotic. You're playing games with me…!

DOCTOR:
No, I am not. I'm quite a straightforward type, really…

FX: KERFUFFLE IN THE CROWD. DISTANT CRIES OF PANIC, AND PEOPLE STARTING TO MOVE QUICKLY.

FLEEING TOWNSFOLK:
They've got a wolf!/
They've got knives!/
That dwarf is swinging an axe around!/
They're taking prisoners!/
Run away…!

DOCTOR:
Interesting. There seems to be some kind of disturbance over at that inn.

DIAMON:
The Severed Paw. There's often trouble there.

DOCTOR:
Yes, but is it usually so bad as to cause a stampede?

DIAMON:
No. Perhaps we should see what's happening.

FX: CROSS TO DIRECTLY OUTSIDE TAVERN.

SHIRI:
(COUGHS LOUDLY, THEN UNINTELLIGIBLY PROCLAIMS: "We demand that you hand over the Storyteller at once. We have his friends — a flame-haired boy and a stinky old man.")

DIAMON:
(RUNNING UP, CLOSE BY) You! Dwarf! What's that you're saying?

DOCTOR:
(BESIDE HER) He's reading something out from a parchment.
(CALLS OUT) Excuse me! I could read that for you, if it'd help?

SHIRI:
(GRUNTS: "Be my guest.")

FX: HANDS OVER PARCHMENT.

DIAMON:
What does it say, Storyteller…?

DOCTOR:
Oh dear, it's a list of demands.

DIAMON:
Who is making demands? Who dares?

DOCTOR:
(PRECIS OF PARCHMENT) There are hostage-takers in the Severed Paw. They demand that the people of Vadhoc hand over the Storyteller at once. They have the Storyteller's friends — a flame-haired boy and a stinky old man. Oh no.

SHIRI:
(ADDS, UNINTELLIGIBLY: "… and we'll chop them both into tiny pieces if you don't."

DOCTOR:
Yes, and they're going to chop them both into tiny pieces if we don't. (SIGHS) Turlough…!

SCENE 9: INT. THE SEVERED PAW

FX: ALITHA PACES HEAVILY AROUND HER SUPINE, WHIMPERING CAPTIVES. ZOUNDS GROWLING.

TURLOUGH:
Why do you want the Storyteller, anyway?

ALITHA:
Are you kidding? Look at us! What do you see?

TURLOUGH:
Where to begin…?

FX: SHIRI ENTERS IN B/G.

ALITHA:
Ne'er-do-wells! Villains! Monsters! Here comes Shiri — how hideous he is! A grumbling, shambolic mute and — oh, help! — what's that he's wielding? An axe! And look — a slavering hell-hound! Now look at me —a fiendish old hag! One glance from me and I can make your hair fall out and your nose drop off! Can't you picture me flying through the teeth of the night astride my broom, or some other handy household implement…?!

TURLOUGH:
Well, yes. Your point is…?

ALITHA:
The point is, they are lies! Lies told by storytellers!

GRAYLING:
Ah…!

ALITHA:
And because of those lies, we are shunned everywhere we go. Some life, eh?

SHIRI/ZOUNDS:
(GRUNT/WHIMPER IN AGREEMENT)

GRAYLING:
Do you really think that's down to what the Storyteller says?

ALITHA:
Are you answering back?

GRAYLING:
I'm simply trying to understand your position, young woman.

ALITHA:
Talk fancy, don't you, for a drunken old tramp?

GRAYLING:
But it's very interesting to me. You're saying that the stories are wrong about you?

TURLOUGH:
Grayling — is this a wise tack to take?

ALITHA:
Of course they've got the wrong idea about us!

GRAYLING:
So you're not nasty and unkind creatures, after all?

ALITHA:
(SCREECHING) *We're perfectly nice and reasonable people actually!*

GRAYLING:
Then — why are you keeping us hostage?

SCENE 10: EXT. SQUARE — OUTSIDE THE SEVERED PAW

DIAMON:
They're threatening to do horrid things to everyone in the tavern?

DOCTOR:
I'm afraid so, yes.

GATHERED CROWD:
(REACTS WITH DISMAY)

DIAMON:
But I don't understand — why do they want the Storyteller?

FX: DOCTOR RATTLES PARCHMENT.

DOCTOR:
According to this, they are 'sick to the back teeth' of being defamed by his tales. Apparently all the good parts go to beautiful princesses and the like.

DIAMON:
Who are these awful people? They're spoiling everything! The people of Vadhoc have been so looking forward to your visit, Storyteller. — Haven't we, everyone?

CROWD:
(ASSENTS ENTHUSIASTICALLY)

DOCTOR:
I tell you, it isn't me…!

DIAMON:
It's dreadful. I can't let these people threaten my subjects. At the same time, I can't hand you over to them, either…

DOCTOR:
It's a dilemma, certainly. Luckily, I've had a little experience of kidnappings and sieges in the past…

DIAMON:
I won't let you get involved, Storyteller.

DOCTOR:
Nonsense! I've had to get myself out of some pretty dicey situations in my time. The Crisis of Gin-Seng, for example. And they were really very savage cat people. I needed my wits about me, that particular afternoon…

DIAMON:
Stay, Storyteller, and tell us all about it…

CROWD:
(INTRIGUED: “Yes, tell us!”)

DOCTOR:
Then there was the business with the Royal Dynasties of the Eisenblatt system — that was a very tricky negotiation to handle. One branch of the family had a genetic glitch and they were living backwards through time, you see, so there were two sides of the family approaching the same century from either end, and that made Coronations and Abdications rather complicated…

DIAMON:
You have a talent for talking your way out of trouble, of that I’ve no doubt.

DOCTOR:
Come to think of it, once I had to sort out a galactic fracas with no words at all. My friend Jo had got herself into a dangerous situation involving a number of giant tortoises — it was all down to the Master, of course — and I had to lower myself into their pit on a three-mile long chain, and wink and blink for her release…

CROWD:
(OOHS AND AHS)

DOCTOR:
I’ve also met people who communicate only by emitting multi-coloured vapour. Now, that takes some skill to pick up!

CROWD:
(RESPECTFUL, AWED LAUGHTER)

DIAMON:
You truly are the Storyteller of legend, aren’t you?

DOCTOR:
No, Diamon.

DIAMON:
Only the Storyteller himself could rattle off such extravagant nonsense with such panache…

DOCTOR:
Panache? — Do you really think so?

DIAMON:
Please, you must stay here, out of danger. And tell us more tales.

CROWD:
("Yes! Tell us more tales!")

DOCTOR:
I'm sorry, but I can't. They've got Turlough in there, so I've got to save him and the others. Now excuse me… coming through…!

FX: HE PUSHES HIS WAY THROUGH CROWD. CROSS TO:

SCENE 11: INT. THE SEVERED PAW

FX: TENSE QUIET — DISTURBED BY THE DOOR SQUEAKING OPEN AND THE DOCTOR STROLLING IN.

DOCTOR:
Hello, I'm the Doctor. I thought I'd give myself up.

ALITHA:
Is this him, Flame-hair?

TURLOUGH:
This is the Doctor, yes.

ALITHA:
Your friend claims that you are the infamous Storyteller!

DOCTOR:
Does he indeed?

TURLOUGH:
None of this is my fault, you know!

ALITHA:
Storyteller: you stand accused of spending your whole career spreading lies and disinformation about actual people. You make me sick, with your good and beautiful princesses, and your foul and truculent dwarves, and your hideous crones!

DOCTOR:
I used all those clichés, did I?

ALITHA:
In your silly, made-up, spiteful tales, which all and sundry always pay heed to…! Spiteful dragons and noble wizards! Pah!

TURLOUGH:
(TO DOCTOR) As you can see, they've got themselves quite worked up about it all.

SHIRI:
(UNINTELLIGIBLY: "Can you blame us?")

ZOUNDS:
(HOWLS)

DOCTOR:
Let's all keep calm, shall we?

TURLOUGH:
Calm?! You said it would be peaceful and idyllic here! But in fact, it's primitive and nasty and it smells. — Could you ask them if I might stand up now?

GRAYLING:
I'd like to stand up, too, please. Old bones.

DOCTOR:
Will you let them go — Alitha? That was how you signed the parchment.

ALITHA:
Only if you give yourself up to us, Storyteller. Only if you let us do with you what we will.

SHIRI/ZOUNDS:
(MENACING GROWLS)

DOCTOR:
Not a very attractive proposition, I have to say.

ALITHA:
Understand our plight, Storyteller. We don't want to be branded as wicked, just because of what we are. I'm not really a witch. I'm just a slightly nasty old woman. Shiri the dwarf — he's simply a small man with a speech impediment. And Zounds the Hell Hound is just a big dog.

DOCTOR:
Yes, yes, I appreciate how rumours start.

ALITHA:
Then you are prepared to face your punishment?

DOCTOR:
If it will save all these other people's lives — then, yes.

TURLOUGH:
That's very noble of you, Doctor, [but —]

GRAYLING:
No! No no no! I cannot allow it!

ALITHA:
That smelly old man — again! Look, who are you?

GRAYLING:
Just a harmless old traveller who hasn't visited these parts in many a long year. A traveller with a secret.

TURLOUGH:
Leave it to the Doctor, Grayling. He knows what he's doing…

ALITHA:
Doctor, You must make amends for the wrongs you have done. Otherwise my Hell-Hound will tear out your throat!

DOCTOR:
I thought you said he wasn't a Hell-Hound?

ZOUNDS:
(GROWLS)

GRAYLING:
I will not let that foolish man suffer in my place!

ALITHA:
Your place? What are you saying, foul-smelling cur?

GRAYLING:
This has all been very amusing. But now I must put a stop to this. (BEGINS TO TAKE OFF CLOAK)

ALITHA:
What!?

FX: MAGICAL FLUTING PULSE BEGINS — DENOTING ALIEN MIND CONTROL TECHNOLOGY. SOMETHING HYPNOTIC ABOUT IT.

TURLOUGH:
Doctor, under his cloak…

GRAYLING:
Do you like them? My magical Storyteller's robes? Look, I've got a special hat, as well!

ALITHA/SHIRI/ZOUNDS/OTHER HOSTAGES:
(CRIES OF WONDERMENT)

TURLOUGH:
Doctor, he appears to be emitting some colourful vapour. (BEAT) Oh… and now he's floating in mid-air.

DOCTOR:
I must admit, that is rather surprising.

ALITHA:
Storyteller! It is YOU!!

GRAYLING:
Yes, yes. And you are right — old hag. It is time that I made amends. Come with me, everyone. Drop your weapons, and your previously-held ideas. Follow me out into Talespinner Square, everybody… Come to hear my very last story of all…!

FX: FOLLOW HIS FLUTING HYPNOTIC TRAIL INTO…

SCENE 12: EXT. SQUARE — OUTSIDE SEVERED PAW [CONTINUOUS]

FX: FLUTING NOISE CONTINUES AS THE STORYTELLER EMERGES FROM THE TAVERN, FOLLOWED BY DOCTOR, HOSTAGES AND VILLAINS.

CROWD:
(DRAWS BACK, HUSHES)

GRAYLING:
Listen, folk of Vadhoc. I don't have very long. You are gathered here for a story, and I've had a request tonight for a very special tale…

ALITHA:
It better be good, old man!

GRAYLING:
You're all quite used to brave, strapping heroes and warriors and fulsome, winsome heroines…

CROWD:
(CHEERS, WOLF WHISTLES)

GRAYLING:
This tale, however, is about the marvellous adventures of a cranky old crone with extraordinary powers…

CROWD:
(BOOS)

GRAYLING:
Now, you must listen!

CROWD:
(HUSHES)

GRAYLING:
Some said she was evil to her innermost core, and that she never washed her hair and smelled of old root vegetables. But she wasn't. Underneath that scab-encrusted, filthy exterior there was a hag of great honour. She alone, out of everyone in the land, was brave enough to face the Infernal Flaming Spectres from the Catacombs of Utter Dreadfulness…

CROWD:
(OOHS AND AHS, ENRAPTURED)

ALITHA:
Yes! He's right! That was me!

GRAYLING:
Except — she wasn't alone, was she? Oh, dear me, no. With her was her dear friend Shiri — a tiny, axe-wielding maniac with a heart of gold. Without that brave midget, our heroine would never have fought off the Moss Demons of the Sussurating Swamps! She'd never have traversed the endless barren plains that were the domain of the flesh-eating ogre, Desmond. For only this brilliant and actually quite sensitive fellow-of-restricted growth had possession of the ancient maps of his forebears, etched in purple ink all over his small and hairy body!

CROWD:
(CHEERS)

SHIRI:
(UNINTELLIGIBLY BLUSHING: "You guys…! Aw, shucks.")

ALITHA:
The wolf! Say something about Zounds the wolf!

GRAYLING:
Ah yes! How could you imagine I'd leave out the most courageous of our merry band of adventurers? Zounds was an amazing genius trapped inside the body of a slavering beastie! He'd been so transformed by a beautiful but thoroughly wicked princess many years before, who was jealous of how he so adored the scabby-fleshed sorceress Alitha!

ZOUNDS:
(HOWLS ECSTATICALLY)

GRAYLING:
But did you know, only the Ancient Moles of the Forbidden Valley knew the secrets of changing back his form?

GRAYLING:
Gather round, everyone… and hear the tale of the witch, the dwarf and the hell-hound, all of whom were terribly nice and brave…

CROWD:
(CHEERS)
CROSS TO:

SCENE 13: EXT. VADHOC TOWN OUTSKIRTS [CONTINUOUS]

FX: FROM OFF, THE CROWD CONTINUES TO REACT TO GRAYLING'S TALE-SPINNING — LOTS OF OOHS AND AHS, CHEERS, LAUGHTER, TENSION, HEARD SPORADICALLY AS DOCTOR AND TURLOUGH WALK OFF AND AWAY.

DIAMON:
(RUNNING AFTER THEM) Doctor! Er, Turlough! Please, wait!

FX: THEY STOP AS DIAMON ARRIVES.

DIAMON:
Where are you going?

DOCTOR:
Princess Diamon. It's time that Turlough and I were on our way.

TURLOUGH:
Long past time, I'd say.

DIAMON:
Please, Doctor. Won't you stay, and hear the end of the story?

DOCTOR:
I've never been all that keen on endings, if I'm honest. It's new beginnings I like.

DIAMON:
But there doesn't have to be an end. Not yet, anyway. (COYLY) Can't you think of a reason to stay?

DOCTOR:
(EMBARRASSED) Er…

DIAMON:
Think, Doctor. Is there nothing I can offer you…?

TURLOUGH:
No, there isn't. Goodbye.

DIAMON:
Oh!

DOCTOR:
It was a very great pleasure to meet you, Princess.

TURLOUGH:
(ALREADY WALKING OFF) Come along, Doctor…!

DIAMON:
(MEANING "IS THAT ALL?") "A very great pleasure".

DOCTOR:
Indeed. Goodbye!

FX: HE WALKS OFF AFTER TURLOUGH. FADE.

SCENE 14: EXT. WOODS [LATER]

FX: FADE UP. NIGHTTIME WOODLAND NOISES. DOCTOR AND TURLOUGH MAKE THEIR WAY UP SLOPE.

TURLOUGH:
Nipping off quite sharpish, aren't we?

DOCTOR:
Things to do, Turlough.

TURLOUGH:
(STOPPING) You don't fool me, Doctor. We're far enough from the village now. Admit it — you're making a quick getaway before you get found out.

DOCTOR:
I beg your pardon?

TURLOUGH:
You helped Frimlish out, obviously! There was that weird fluting noise; then all that colourful vapour… and as for the floating-on-air bit, I've no idea how you did that. A holographic projection, powered by some strange device from your pockets?

DOCTOR:
That all sounds terribly complicated. Are you sure we weren't all simply mesmerised by the power of his story-telling?

TURLOUGH:
Come off it, Doctor, it's me you're talking to. It was you. It must have been! You came up with some clever scheme to divert everyone's attention. (BEAT) What I don't understand is how the old man knew about it. He must have been in on it, or…

DOCTOR:
Or nothing, Turlough. It was all down to Grayling Frimlish himself. Just the power of his words.

TURLOUGH:
But I saw lights. I heard music…

DOCTOR:
He's famous all over this small, dark little world for his talents.

TURLOUGH:
You can't tell me it was magic. You don't believe in magic.

DOCTOR:
I believe that Grayling Frimlish is very old. He might even be the oldest person on this planet, at this point in history.

TURLOUGH:
You'll be saying he isn't human next.

DOCTOR:
What if I were to tell you that Grayling Frimlish was the last of a whole species of Storytellers, who fell into this world from another dimension a very long time ago?

TURLOUGH:
(SCEPTICAL) With weird, unknowable mesmeric powers, I suppose? Which they used to cast a spell over their audience?

DOCTOR:
Who thrived on the power of belief, hence their story-telling. But as humankind grew every more cynical and disbelieving, they began to die out. Round about now, quite probably.

TURLOUGH:
You're spinning me another yarn, aren't you?

DOCTOR:
Do you recall what he said, when we met him? How he was near the end of his travels, and his story, too? He might even have been the very last of his kind. In which case, we were very fortunate to meet him.

TURLOUGH:
Alright. Say I believe you. Why don't we go back for him?

DOCTOR:
Storytellers always need new adventures to tell. If he knew who I was, he'd have tried to steal my stories. I'm not immune to his mesmerism, Turlough. There are some things I daren't risk revealing.

TURLOUGH:
Probably too outlandish even for him.

DOCTOR:
Quite.

FX: A WOLF HOWLS DISTANTLY.

TURLOUGH:
That wasn't a real wolf, was it?

DOCTOR:
In medieval Europe? Almost certainly.

TURLOUGH:
Doctor, it’s getting dark.

DOCTOR:
Yes. Let’s get back to the TARDIS, shall we?

FX: THEY RUSH OFF, UP THE HILL.

THE END